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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001834

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: MUBARAK VISIT YIELDS A PROFFERED EMBRACE

REF: ANKARA 1745

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Egyptian President Mubarak's visit to Ankara December 15-16 focused on bilateral ties and the Middle East during lengthy separate discussions with President Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, Deputy PM Babacan, FM Davutoglu, and Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief Basbug. Although the Turkish media reported that Palestine was the main topic, Egyptian Embassy DCM Salama told us that bilateral trade, visa issues, and a Turkish proposal for a bilateral "strategic council" also were on the agenda. On the Palestinian issue, both sides expressed skepticism about the current Israeli leadership, but both underscored their support for Palestine Authority President Abbas as the sole leader of the Palestinians, according to Salama and the MFA. Both sides agreed that Iran must cooperate with the international community and forgo nuclear aspirations. Salama said both sides reiterated their opposition to a military option in dealing with Iran. Both sides were pleased with the dramatic increase in bilateral trade. The GOT proposed that visa requirements be lifted; the Egyptians said they would "look into it." The GOT also proposed that the "strategic dialogue" mechanism between the two countries be elevated to a "strategic council." DCM Salama seemed dubious about the efficacy of the proposed council. Although nothing was signed, the working visit is being described as positive. FM Davutoglu is planning a visit to Egypt in February of 2010 and the strategic council and visa regime will be on the agenda. END SUMMARY

12. (C) In his second visit to Turkey during 2009, Egyptian President Mubarak arrived in Ankara December 15 for a 24-hour blitz that produced a lengthy meeting with President Gul, complete with ceremonial trappings, and a series of separate discussions December 16 with PM Erdogan, Deputy PM Babacan, FM Davutoglu, and TGS Chief Basbug. In a side meeting, FM Davutoglu met with Egyptian FM Ahmed Aboul Gheit and Egypt's Chief of Intelligence Omar Suleiman. According to a readout from Egyptian DCM Amal Salama, the Mubarak working visit resulted in a positive exchange of views that yielded "no disagreements." In a separate briefing, Sinan Ertay in the MFA's Egypt office also described the visit as positive but did note that the two sides had disagreed on Cyprus. Ertay said that the GOT asked the GOE to be more "favorable and objective" on this issue.

Agreed Support for Abbas

13. (C) DCM Salama said that neither side was optimistic about the situation in Palestine or the current Israeli leadership. Salama said that although the GOT has been supportive of Hamas -- in contrast to Cairo's stance -- this was not viewed as a problem since both countries underscored their support for Palestinian Authority President Abbas, as the sole leader

of the Palestinians. Ertay said that the GOT appreciates the GOE's traditional leadership role in the Middle East, but also noted that the Egyptian Government appears to be "frustrated with the Israeli position." Ertay also noted Egyptian Chief of Intelligence Omar Suleiman's December 20 visit to Israel. These confidence building measures are to continue in January 2010 when Suleiman is scheduled to meet with both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Ertay said there was no talk of further coordination between the GOT and GOE on Palestinian reconciliation.

¶4. (C) The GOT and GOE were in full agreement with regard to Iran. Neither side wanted to see a nuclear Iran. Ertay said that the GOE was in an awkward position because it does not have diplomatic relations with Iran. The GOE is trying to normalize relations, but the issue is still problematic. Salama noted that the GOT still insisted that FM Davutoglu could work something out with Iran on its nuclear impasse, but she was skeptical.

¶5. (C) Both sides touted the dramatic increase in bilateral trade in the two years since signing a Free Trade Agreement. Trade has increased from \$800 million in 2007 to \$2.5 billion in the first nine months of 2009. The total for 2009 is expected to top \$3 billion. Some 260 Turkish firms (mostly in textiles) are currently active in Egypt. The Sixth of October City was cited by Ertay as an example of an area with a heavy concentration of Turkish economic involvement.

¶6. (C) Visas were one issue where the two sides seemed out of step. Salama said that the GOT had surprised their Egyptian guests by proposing that the visa requirement between the two

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countries be lifted. She said she had guessed this might be raised, given the trend in Ankara's treatment of its regional neighbors, but had not been given any advance warning. The GOE did not commit to any decision, stating only that they were still "looking at it."

Proposal to Elevate the Dialogue

¶7. (C) Salama said that the GOT also said it was interested in elevating the existing "strategic dialogue" mechanism between the FMs of Egypt and Turkey to a "strategic council" format. Salama did not seem enthused, and intimated that this may be excessive given the existing strategic dialogue mechanism which has been in place for two years. Ertay was more upbeat about the prospects of the proposed council, which he said both sides had agreed to in principle. This council would elevate the dialogue to the PM level and also include other ministries. He told us that there would be some developments in early 2010. FM Davutoglu is planning to visit Egypt in February of 2010 to discuss the same issues.

¶8. (C) In a separate meeting, Egyptian Embassy First Secretary Mohamed Moussa also derided the proposed council as an unnecessary move and told us that this is the prevailing sentiment in Cairo. Moussa said that Turkey has proposed such strategic councils with so many countries as to render them meaningless. Still, he suggested that the GOE is likely to go along only because it would not represent any dramatic change from the existing framework. He complained that Turkey seems to have a penchant for raising the same issues (i.e., waiving visa requirements and strategic cooperation/councils) with every country. On the proposed lifting of the visa regime, Moussa said the GOE will not be inclined to take action in the near future.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Although the Turkish media and GOT representatives are touting President Mubarak's working visit as positive and successful, and the Egyptians appreciated the protocol concessions of having all the GOT officials except Gul come to Mubarak in his hotel suite, the prevailing tone seems to have been correct but decidedly cool. The Turkish

MFA acknowledges that Egypt remains a heavyweight in the region, but believes that Turkey's profile is more dynamic and increasingly more influential.
SILLIMAN

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